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Session 6: The California Audiovisual Preservation Project:

Discovering the State's Rich Audiovisual Heritage

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Since 2001, the California Preservation Program has been helping libraries and archives preserve their collections. The CPP has been supported by the California State Library with funding from LSTA and in recent years, extracurricular grants from NEH and IMLS for specific projects. Its work is guided by the CPP Steering Committee with leadership from Barclay Ogden and Julie Page, with representatives from public libraries, academic libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies. We meet twice a year to identify the preservation needs of institutions with heritage collections, to develop ways to address the needs, and to evaluate the success of the CPP's multiple services and projects. The CPP is best known for our disaster preparedness and planning workshops, 24/7 emergency phone service and on-site assistance to avoid disaster losses, development and support of regional disaster mutual aid networks, preservation reference service via telephone and email, as well as web-based information at CalPreservation.org and on-going webinars and workshops, including a new workshop in 2010/2011 on creating and funding preservation projects to enhance collection care and a basic digital preservation workshop.

In April 2007, we focused our attention on providing direct preservation services to California libraries and identified a critical need for Audio/Visual Preservation across a wide range of institutions, both large and small, because so much audiovisual media was threatened by fragile physical condition, format obsolescence, and the lack of playback equipment.

Recognizing the seriousness of the threat to the survival of California's audiovisual heritage, the California State Library awarded funding to the California Preservation Program to undertake a statewide survey to document the scope and scale of the audiovisual preservation problem.

CALIPR, a survey instrument specific to audiovisual materials was used for the project. Originally developed for the California State Library by UC Berkeley in the early 1990's to survey paper-based collections, CALIPR was rewritten for the Web and modified to accommodate audiovisual collections. Data gathered was based on random samples from collections and documents the significant threats to the survival of California's heritage of audiovisual recordings. By October 2007, thirty-two libraries and archives statewide had participated in the survey, representing 1,061,000 moving image and sound recordings.

From the survey results, we developed a short list of actions and cost estimates that reflected the needs of only those libraries & archives that participated in the survey:

1. Catalog and make known potentially valuable audiovisual recordings that currently remain unprocessed, unknown, and therefore unlikely to be selected to be preserved as part of California's audiovisual heritage.
2. Provide staff and user education programs to reduce the inevitable, though unintentional, wear & damage to recordings from patron use.

3. Establish a reformatting program to copy high value/high risk analog and digital recordings to current digital media.
4. Establish a digital preservation program to ensure the survival of digitally reformatted moving image and sound recordings.
5. Create disaster preparedness and collection salvage plans for all libraries and archives with audiovisual collections.

The costs for a California preservation program to meet the needs of all historically significant moving image and recorded sound collections are very substantial, but the costs to get started with the most cost effective preservation program elements and with the best known, best loved recordings of the 20th Century were within reach. In 2010-2011, with funding from the California State Library and the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program at New York University, the CPP proceeded to develop a prototype a statewide service.

Our goal was to:

- Build a statewide program to preserve moving image and recorded sound collections.
- Using the 2007 statewide survey data, form a coalition of concerned institutions, industry representatives, and California citizens for the purpose of incorporating these collections into the statewide preservation plan.
- Educate the public on the need and importance of preserving California A/V heritage, identify historically important A/V collections, and promote best preservation practices to preserve them.

The first six months of CAVPP was a period of research and development, gathering best practices, choosing standards for file formats, file naming and metadata schema, developing worksheets for descriptive and rights metadata capture and, last but not least, guiding partner archives through the permission process.

Just over half of the institutions that participated in the 2007 survey responded to the call for nominating titles for the CAVPP. The participants identified recordings for digitization based on the following criteria:

- statewide and/or local historical significance - featuring widely known names and events
- risk of loss due to physical condition and format obsolescence
- never published commercially- must be primary source material
- intellectual property in the public domain, held by the owning library, or secured from the rights holder, when possible
- cataloging data can be provided by the owning archive

One of the major benefits evident from the Project so far is the ability to see and hear content that before was an obsolete and troublesome piece of media on the shelf. The partners are able to access the content and can add further description, and researchers, historians, scholars and the general public are able to enjoy and study new primary source materials.

At the California Historical Society, we had no difficulty choosing our first nominees, which included eleven labor-related oral histories, the most popular of which has now been downloaded 66 times. These were recorded on audiocassettes in the 1970s to document the 1934 General Strike and the role of women in the California Labor Movement. Since the oral histories were digitized, interest has increased, as have requests for online transcripts. We are currently working on a project to digitize and upload the transcripts to the Internet Archive. The project has helped us determine which recordings are most relevant and interesting to the public. We have also learned that the online availability of Elaine Black Yoneda's oral history, a prominent woman radical and labor activist has made it possible for her great-grandchildren to hear her voice for the first time. Another repository has expressed interest in using clips from one of our oral histories in an upcoming exhibition, and we've included a clip from the film "Tanker" is featured in our new exhibition, *Curating the Bay*, which just opened. "Tanker" documents the wartime operations of Marinship in Sausalito and has been downloaded over 266 times, making it our most popular recording so far.

To date, CHS has 16 recordings online and 14 more films and videos on obsolete formats will be available on the Internet Archive soon, including seven previously unviewed Super 8 films shot in Jonestown, Guyana in the 1970s; and video tapes produced by the Historic American Building Survey documenting the San Francisco Zen Center, ruins at Llano del Rio, and other historic structures and places.

We have also taken advantage of the special rates offered by the CAVPP vendor to digitize other films in our collection. The Burr-Allyne Family Papers and Photographs collection includes several home movies depicting San Francisco photographer Alice Burr and her sister Marian's 1929-1930 travels throughout Africa and southeast Asia, but only Alice's "San Francisco to Rainier" travel film is included in California Light & Sound.

Not only has the CAVPP dramatically increased access to our important AV holdings, it has also helped us address important copyright and preservation issues. The project guides us in thinking about and acting on copyright issues by providing a model for conducting due diligence, providing access to orphaned AV works, and preserving digital surrogates for AV recordings.

Next we would like to focus on evaluating and estimating costs to digitize a large number of the broadcast news clips and special events captured on separate VHS video cassettes by some of the organizations whose records we hold, including the ACLU of Northern California and the League of Women Voters. We need to determine the extent and duration of each news clip and research the copyright implications of aggregating a large quantity of very brief broadcasts--most are 90 seconds or less. We envision that these could serve as both a chronological guide and video "subject file" documenting issues of concern to these organizations.